Interview with Charles Stuart Kennedy

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

CHARLES STUART KENNEDY

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Initial interview date: July 24, 1986

Q: This is the first of a series of interviews on the theme "Movement of Peoples as an Issue in American Foreign Policy." Mr. Kennedy was in the Foreign Service of the United States from 1955 to 1985, and has much experience in consular and movement of peoples issues.

First of all, Mr. Kennedy, could you give us some idea about why it is that you entered the Foreign Service and then why it is that you spent most of your career in consular affairs?

KENNEDY: Vic, just to be brief, I came into the Foreign Service mainly because of language. This sounds silly, because anyone who knows me, knows I am an abysmal linguist, but when I went away to school, I graduated from Kent School in 1946, they had a very rigorous language program. In those days, everyone who went there took at least three years of Latin and three years of French, and then you had to take something else or continue in Latin and French. I barely made it through, but I ended up by taking my three years of Latin, three years of French, and two years of Spanish.

With that language background, I very prudently did not take any language when I went to college. I graduated from Williams at the end of May 1950 and the Korean War started on June 25. I was not a veteran. I decided it would be a good idea to go into the Air Force,

rather than the infantry. When I appeared at basic training before the sergeant, they asked me if I had had any languages. I said, “Sergeant, I did very poorly in them, but, of course, I did have three years of Latin, three years of French, and two years of Spanish.” Wham! I went immediately to the Army Language School and took Russian for a year, again at which I did rather poorly, but I did take Russian, and it sent me overseas.

While overseas, I was very interested in living abroad, so I thought I would take a crack at the Foreign Service exam, which before I never would have considered. But because I did have some Russian and had had a full year of it, I thought maybe I might be able to pass the language part of the exam. I had served in both South Korea and a little bit in North Korea during the war, Japan, and then in Germany. So I took the exam while I was in Germany, oddly enough at the Consulate General in Frankfurt. In those days, it was a three-and-a-half day exam. I passed the written part. I did not pass the language part. They would allow you to take a make-up exam when you came into the Foreign Service. So I moved on.

I got a master's degree at Boston University under the G.I. Bill, and I took courses in diplomatic history. I took the Foreign Service exam and came in, in July '55.My class was the first of a whole new series of classes of junior officers. Prior to that, there had been a hiatus of junior Foreign Service officers being trained together and then going out in the field because it was during the McCarthy era, and they weren't recruiting very many people in the Foreign Service. Then the State Department was geared up again to start a whole new series of regular recruitment of junior Foreign Service officers, and I was one of about 25 that came in at this new period of recruitment. I had no idea what I wanted to be at the time, and I was told that consular work was to be avoided, but my first assignment, along with about five or six of our other junior officers, was to deal with the Refugee Relief Program. This Refugee Relief Act had been passed a year or two before, which was designed to deal with refugees who were still left in the refugee camps throughout Western Europe. Do you remember what the Act was?

Q: The Displaced Persons Act, I think.

KENNEDY: It was the Displaced Persons Act before, which had gotten most of displaced refugee type people that had moved from being displaced to being refugees, but they were basically the same people. This was an Act designed to get those people who still were coming out from behind the Iron Curtain. This was ten years after the war, but many of these people had been in refugee camps since the end of the war, for over ten years. Congress passed this Act to do something about it.

Q: Do you have any recollection of what the total numbers were in the camps when you first started doing this work in 1955?

KENNEDY: I don't. I really don't. I know we had two different types of people there. One, some who for some reason or another who had been rejected by the Displaced Persons Act; we had the feeling, that law had been rather casually administered, and a good number of people who probably should have been qualified under it fell between the cracks and were still there. We also had people coming out from Yugoslavia, Poland, from the Soviet Union, but mainly in Eastern Europe, who had gotten across from East Germany and who had established themselves as refugees. So we had the two types.

Q: In other words, you had one group who were essentially sufferers under the Nazis during the period of the Third Reich, and then you had the second group, those who came out, fleeing from the tyranny of what in those days was called the Stalinist imperialism, if you will.

KENNEDY: Yes. Actually, there was a third type. I did not deal with it personally, but this was a very political Act. So that we had people who were in a very large program in Italy, a very large program in, of all places, Holland, but Italy had some refugee camps, Holland had none. But the law was very gradually interpreted for purely political motives, to allow large numbers of Dutch and Italians to come in beyond the normal quota. The reason for

this was that I think the head of the judicial committee in the House was run by Emmanuel Celler of New York City, whose district included a fairly substantial Italian community. He was a Democrat. On the Republican side, the minority member was a lady who came from Holland, Michigan, which had a lot of Dutch coming there, and they wanted to get more in.

Q: I think that was the district that subsequently was held by President Gerald Ford.

KENNEDY: It may well have been. So you had this sort of aberration of the law. I was assigned to Frankfurt, Germany, as a number of the other young officers came in with me, assigned to this Refugee Relief Program, but it was not to be our career. This was just a normal vice consular job which people had, but we were specifically designated as Refugee Relief officers.

Q: Who was the head of that program in Frankfurt when you were there?

KENNEDY: We had a consul general, John Burns, who later became Director General of the Foreign Service. This program was run, really, quite separately from the consulate general. We were eventually moved to a separate building. The man who was in charge of it was a man named David Kravetz. David Kravetz had been basically a file room clerk, rather poorly educated, but a real hard-charging operator. Initially, the Refugee Relief Program was very small and really almost unworkable.

Let me explain why it was unworkable. The law specified that before anybody got a visa under the Refugee Relief Act, they had to have a thorough background check. Usually this meant that they were investigated. We worked out of Army's CID or whatever. They did a lot of interviews and all. Then if they passed all these interviews, they were sent to Refugee Relief officers like myself, and evaluated. Mainly we asked for more information. Then they came up to be interviewed, both by a State Department officer, a vice consul, and then if they passed that, they went next door to an office of the Immigration Service, which was quite an innovation that they actually had an office right there, so they were interviewed by the Immigration officer. Often, the Immigration officer would be a little more

hard-nosed than the State Department officer, and would turn them down. But it wasn't a very workable situation.

Q: Why would it be that the Immigration and Naturalization Service officer was more hard-nosed than the State Department officer? Would it have something to do with perceptions of foreign policy, or would there be other reasons?

KENNEDY: I think it was really that you've got to look at the type of person who came in. The Immigration officer, for the most part, had been on the beat back in the United States. Immigration officers generally turn people down if they can, because they think of the problem of catching people after the fact. So they looked at the law more literally and thought of the problems that might occur later on. I think the typical young vice consul who was thrown into this program would think in terms of foreign policy it was a good thing to relieve Europe of the burden of refugees while it was recovering from the war, and “isn't it nice to be nice to these people, and they really need it,” and not really thinking about maybe the repercussions if you let the wrong person in. The Immigration officer had to chase them around.

Q: You were then talking about the management program, where the head of the program in Frankfurt perhaps compounded it by not being particularly well-trained. You said it was virtually unmanageable. I wonder if you could continue along that line.

KENNEDY: It was really not so much the situation. As a matter of fact, it was the law that was unmanageable. David Kravetz, for all his crudity, was really not the administrative problem. I was somewhat nonplused in being part of the Refugee Relief team. I rather expected I was going to be getting into a rather fancy outfit. I'd heard for years about the Foreign Service, and I thought we'd be sitting around in striped pants, drinking tea. The Refugee Relief Act was quite a change.

No, the problem was that the Refugee Relief Act was administered out of Bonn, and basically bypassing the consul general, which made Consul General Burns mad as

hell. We creatures of the Refugee Relief Act, although regular Foreign Service officers, were sort of ignored, and we felt very much outcast. But the problem was that with the investigation system and the two key system, the vice consul had a pass and then the Immigration officer had a pass, and a rather slow and cumbersome investigation period, very few cases were coming before us. We had several interviews a day, and that was about it.

The program was to end at the end of 1956, on December 31, 1956. Well, about eight or nine months before that, voices began to be raised in Congress, saying, “We authorized so and so many people.” I don't remember the figures, but in the Refugee Relief Act you can see a certain number there. And we weren't even approaching that. Many congressmen and senators were saying, “What is this? You people aren't doing this.” So the political heat was on, and all of a sudden we geared up. Towards the end, we were working literally 12 hours a day, seven days a week, interviewing, rushing people through. The whole process was cut down.

Q: You mean the time that was involved in processing a case was reduced.

KENNEDY: Absolutely. The investigations became cursory in many cases, and sometimes, depending on the crowd we had at the door, we were interviewing people after the Immigration officer had, and vice versa. I think technically they had to be the second, but we would do it any way. We were going after numbers, rather than making sure the case was done well. It was a very complicated situation, because for us to sort out the problems, really the problems of Europe during the war and post-war decades, it was very difficult.

To give an example, we were dealing with Russians, some were anti-Communist, some had served with General Vlasov against the Soviets, others had left at different times of the Soviet regime and had fled to the West. All of them were denouncing each other. The

investigators essentially stopped asking hard questions. We had people who came up before us who had been accused of being Nazis. [Tape recorder turned off]

Q: We were discussing the various strange groups of people who had come out of the Soviet Union, everyone denouncing everyone else, the people who were in the Vlasov Army, and the like.

KENNEDY: Yes. It was not just people from the Soviet Union, but from other places, too. In fact, what you really had was a not very trained group of people, and I include both the young Foreign Service officers, as well as the Immigration officers dealing with the complexities of the post-war problems of Europe.

I would love to give you an example of a place I knew more about, and that was Yugoslavia. You had Chetniks, you had Communists, you had Ustashi, you had Albanian separatists, you had Bulgarian separatists, Macedonian nationalists, you had Hungarians; everybody got into the act. They all hated each other. So the people who were doing the investigations, they would get all sorts of denunciations.

Q: Do you feel you have more you want to talk about of this part of your career, or do you want to move on to some of the other posts and assignments?

KENNEDY: I would like to talk just a little more about this, because it was my first real exposure to how things actually worked in the Government.

Vice consuls, for the most part, were more partisan in favor of our clients, as opposed to the Immigration officers, who had, as I described before, a different attitude. Often, if we had a case that we felt very strongly about, sometimes we would do a little bargaining, because we were right next door: “I won't fight you on this one if you'll let this one go.” Because if there was a protest, you could appeal these cases, at least to the immediate boss. There was a certain amount of horse trading.

Another one was that as the Act began to wind down, I saw something that was an eye-opener to me and remained an eye-opener for me the rest of my career, and that's how things can be done in the Government. Because Washington wanted to pin the blame on somebody it wanted to find out where the bottlenecks were, they had a very statistical sort of matrix, to show where each case was located. Was it with INS, with Public Health, with the investigators? Who was holding things up? So we used to keep these figures. I watched David Kravetz manipulate these figures to make sure that the blame didn't fall on us; it was Public Health's fault or the Immigration Service or the investigators' fault.

Q: Would you say that he did significant manipulating to really shift blame, or would you say that the way it came out in reporting was the way it actually was?

KENNEDY: I would say a bit of both. These things are open to interpretation, and creative interpretation could put the blame somewhere else. Actually, we were moving things rather quickly in our case, and everything got very superficial treatment. I have been asked by investigators from the Department of Justice in the 1980s about our procedures back in the 1950s. They are catching some war criminals who slipped through our very loose investigatory net and who were subsequently identified thirty years later. These young attorneys who were not born or were in swaddling clothes at the time we were pushing refugees into the U.S. obviously don't understand how we operated in those days of political pressure and that we knew that there would be questions later, but under the circumstances it was “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”

Q: Do you have any sense of the numbers that were processed under the Refugee Relief Act during 1955-58? I realize that these statistics can be found in the appropriate documentation, but would you say that what you did made a significant dent in the number of refugees, displaced persons, and others? In other words, at the end of the Act, were there more than there had been before, less than there had been before? And if there were more, was it because new people were coming, or what exactly was the situation?

KENNEDY: I'm not sure. It was a significant Act when you added it all together, including those from Italy and from Holland, where there in Italy and in Holland, for example, they qualified under the Act if their house was bombed during the war and they had to move across the street. Literally, that made them refugees. Purely a political interpretation, but the idea was to get them in. When you add it all up, we did pretty well clean out most of the camps by this Act. But as far as the figures go, I am afraid I can't tell you.

Q: I see that you were in Dhahran in Saudi Arabia from 1958 to 1960. What kind of work did you do there, and could you give us some indications about special problems insofar as it related to movement of peoples?

KENNEDY: Once again, I was assigned, as often happened to junior officers, to another vice consul's slot, as the sole consular officer in Dhahran. I was a little unhappy with this, because I thought now is the time to become a real honest to God diplomat, as I'd been told that is the job one should aspire to, and to do that, you really have to go to an embassy, but I went to where I was ordered.

We had very little immigration on the part of the Saudis. But we had a rather large number of Yemenis who came in, because at that time we had no post at Sanaa in Yemen, and they would come to our consulate there because also our consulate covered all of the Persian Gulf, except for Kuwait. At that time, there were British protectorates at Bahrain and Qatar and the southern states. So we got the Yemenis to appear with some sort of handwritten, so-called documentation and petitions which had been approved by the Immigration Service from their brother in usually Youngstown, Ohio, or Lackawanna, New York, as I recall. Most of them were working in the steel mills

Q: I take it the Yemenis you're talking about are from what is now North Yemen, not South Yemen, because South Yemen presumably was covered by our consulate in Aden, am I correct?

KENNEDY: I'm not sure. I suppose so, but many of these Yemenis also were working in the oil fields. They were hired to work in the oil fields in Saudi Arabia or the Emirates, and they would move up. Many of these cases were rather dubious. There wasn't much we could do about it. “Brother,” I think, was a very loose term; they were often cousins. But they had passed the scrutiny of INS, so they were issued visas.

Another visa function was to go to Bahrain, where there were a lot of Indians and a few others there, and the law at that time excluded people from what was called the Asian Pacific Triangle, which meant that we issued, I think, to people who were born in India, maybe 100 a year. I would have people come up in Bahrain as I'd step off the plane. I'd go there once a month. They'd say, “How is my case coming along?” I'd look at it and say, “Well, it's moving. Instead of 130 years, you only have 125 years to wait.” I mean, literally of that nature until the great reform of 1967 came.

One case I do remember was Iraqi Jews who were refugees in Bahrain, and they were going to St. Louis, where they had a brother, jewelers, I believe. I got a little touch of the old sort of Biblical history, because I noticed that the young men of the family referred to two women, who, according to my records, one was the wife of the principal applicant, and the other was his sister-in-law, but the young men both referred to her as “mother.” According to Jewish custom, he had taken her on as his wife, although I think they were all in their '60s or '70s at the time. So I carefully had to coach the young man, “For God's sake, don't call this sister-in-law, your aunt, 'mother' when you get to the Immigration office, or they won't understand, and you might all get kicked out because of bigamy.”

Q: You had an assignment in Washington in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and you also had Serbo-Croatian language training. But then I think the next big assignment you had that touches on this issue was as consul in Belgrade from 1962 to 1967. One of the things that would strike me as being significant here was the juxtaposition of our having essentially friendly relations with a Communist state, on the one hand, and the very

stringent anti-Communist position laid down in the McCarran-Walters Act when it comes to visa issuances. Was that a major preoccupation for you?

KENNEDY: Yes, it was, because we wanted to encourage nonimmigrant travel of the elite, the people we thought would return to Yugoslavia after visiting the United States. It was the only Communist country at that time with whom we had really close relations, but we had this law that just said if you were a member of the Communist Party or something, you had to get a waiver. The Immigration Service was really very good with this, because we could call the Immigration Service. They had posts in Vienna and in Frankfurt. And I could get a waiver over the phone, if necessary. But emigration created some problems, because many of the people who came to us would have been affiliated one way or the other, usually not Communist Party members, but they'd belong to the Workers Alliance or the Communist League, this type of thing. We would have to find out whether or not they were significant members or just rank and file members.

George Kennan felt his importance, because at that point he was a well-known historian and political thinker, as well as being somebody who had left the Foreign Service, and had been personally picked by President Kennedy for the position. So I had trouble, because every time I had a visa case that caused me problems, he was quite willing to get on the phone and call up Robert Kennedy, who was Attorney General at the time, to straighten it out, and I didn't think this was the right way to do this. You usually got around it by sort of going at a lower level.

Our problem there in Yugoslavia was really both the Communist side and dealing with getting waivers, but also initially nonimmigrant visas for so-called visitors who actually planned to go to the United States. We had a great deal of trouble sorting out the “good visitors” from the “bad visitors.”

Q: I know that in other Eastern European countries, there are several categories of what are called “bad visitors.” One category are those who use the non-immigrant visa to come

to the United States and stay permanently; the other are those who use the non-immigrant visa to go to the United States, work for a number of years, save their American dollar earnings as much as they can, and then when they return to their country, they are in a very good financial situation to live well. I know, for example, that this is a pattern or was, at any rate, in the late '70s, as far as Poland was concerned. Did you encounter that sort of thing in Yugoslavia?

KENNEDY: Not as much as in some other countries, but we had our problems. Western Macedonia was a particular thorn in the consular side. There was an extensive Macedonia community in some of the factory towns of our Midwest, especially in Gary, Indiana. We would sometimes get a busload of men and women from the little town of Ljubojno, near Bitola, asking for visitors' visas. Our experience was that most were going to stay as that was the pattern. It was no fun to sit and interview person after person, often young peasant women who were going to Gary or the like to be presented at the local Macedonia Hall for the bachelors of the community to look over and select them for their brides, and house servants (the wedding came first and then the house work came immediately thereafter). Sometimes we would break down and take a chance hoping that some of our visitors might return. I remember issuing one visa and noting on the approval card that the young lady I was issuing the visa to was so lacking in physical attributes of beauty that I was sure she would not be asked to stay. She was married within a month of entry. I sometimes think that the good citizens of the Gary should put up a monument to the consular officers whose mistaken judgments made the population of their city grow.

In 1967 Montreal had a world's fair, called Expo '67. Air Yugoslavia arranged for special charter flights to go to Canada for those who wanted to see the fair. The flights stopped off in the United States so we were in the transit visa business. We were flooded with applicants who wanted to see the fair. Now there were special air fares which was an inducement, but we were very suspicious when we had busloads of people coming up for visas who had never even been to Belgrade before, but suddenly had a yen to see a fair in

Canada. We had to turn down many of these visas, much to the annoyance of the airline people.

We had many people who were getting Social Security benefits, who had been working in the United States, some through the war years, all had returned and were living rather well on what we would normally consider to be a modest pension, but in Yugoslavia at the time, it was significant. They had left their families behind. But the ones we were getting at that point were people who were just trying to get out. Yugoslavia was depressed and it was a little hard to get money back, and so the ones that were going were trying, as far as we knew, to settle permanently, but it was a little hard to judge at that point.

Q: What else do you think was significant, as far as movement of peoples is concerned, with regard to the five years you were in Yugoslavia? Can you give us any other thoughts?

KENNEDY: We did deal with the problem of escapees. Yugoslavia was sort of a semi-closed window for the rest of Eastern Europe. Many Eastern Europeans could get into Yugoslavia for vacations, for business trips, but they couldn't get into the West, because they would appear to be defecting, leaving. We spent a good bit of our time interviewing people from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, not really from the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, who would see the American flag and felt they were there in Yugoslavia, feeling somewhat anonymous, felt they could come and talk with them about getting out, seeking refuge. We couldn't give refuge to them because they were not in imminent danger.

Q: You're referring to the asylum process, the distinction between what one could call legation asylum and territorial asylum.

KENNEDY: Yes.

Q: You couldn't give legation asylum.

KENNEDY: We couldn't give legation asylum. Then they would ask us, “How do I get to Italy or Greece?” which were the two main places to go. We would have to say, “We can't advise you to do this,” because we had a concern about our relations with the Yugoslavs. But we'd say, “If I were doing this, I certainly wouldn't try this border crossing point. Maybe this one. We've heard people go through here.” So we'd give them a certain amount of direction. The Yugoslav attitude was sort of “iffy,” because they didn't want to be the prison guards for these people, but at the same time, they didn't want to lose their credibility with the rest of the Communist world. So sometimes they would pick them up at the border; other times they'd just shoo them back; other times they'd turn a blind eye and let them go across.

Q: Do you have any sense as to the percentages who fell in each category?

KENNEDY: I'd hate to judge. There was a significant number of people, particularly during the summer months, who came to us to ask for assistance, including people from other Communist countries, on getting out. We would talk to them and listen to them, try to give them as good advice as we could without jeopardizing our position with the Yugoslavs.

Before finishing with Yugoslavia I should mention the problems of fraud. They were not significant as compared to many other countries, but we had our problems. I had received a few unsubstantiated complaints about our chief visa clerk, Madam Zhukov. She was a very distinguished elderly lady who was in charge of quota control, which called forth immigrant visa applicants when their registration date was reached. It was hard for me to believe that she was engaged in some sort of shady deal, and the allegations were vague. I checked out whatever I could, but they smacked of sour grapes, of people who did not get visas for perfectly legitimate reasons. Then one day I was called early in the morning and told that Madam Zhukov had died in her sleep. After going to her apartment to pay my respects, she was lying on her bed while all of us gathered around and mumbled nice things about her, I returned to my office. There I had to immediately settle the line of succession. The other Yugoslav ladies who had worked under Madam

Zhukov were all atwitter over who would take her place, with all sort of rumors going around about what I was planning to do. At that point I was not planning anything but to get through the day. But the concern was such that I had to settle the matter right away. During my conversations with the potential successors I learned that Madam Zhukov had indeed been taking advantage of the system. She would take a perfectly straightforward case shortly before we were due to set up an appointment for an interview and to issue the immigrant visa, call up the person and make a big show of going through the file, tisk-tisking and making discouraging sounds as she read the file. This would make the applicant nervous and ask what the problem was? Madam Zhukov would say that there were difficulties and she was not sure if a visa could be issued. The applicant would ask what should be done and Madam Zhukov would suggest that they see a lawyer, and give a name. The applicants usually rose to the bait and did that, with the lawyer and Madam Zhukov splitting the fee. Since the visa was almost always issued there were few complaints, and the ones I received were not specific enough. The ladies of the visa unit saw this but were afraid of the Grande Dame and said nothing until she was dead, and told all within a few hours.

Another learning experience for me was on how to treat instructions from the Department. I discovered the hard way that you really have to look at everything from the local point of view and modify, if necessary. In 1966 or 1967 there was a major reform of the visa law which eliminated, among other things, the possibility of anyone signing up for a visa with little hope of ever being called. We had people who were registered as non-preference applicants who had no close relatives in the U.S. or line of work that would qualify them under the law, but they could put their names down on the list prior to the law reform. We had almost 100,000 on our waiting list and just from a office point of view it was a major burden since we were always having to answer letters and explaining that the waiting list was not moving, etc. The new law allowed us to cancel these applications after we explained that they had to be qualified, by job or close relative, which meant either parents, spouse, child or brothers or sisters in the United States.

The Department sent us a form letter that we were to translate into Serbian and send out to everyone. We expected that we would be able to cancel thousands and thousands of registrations after the applicants realized they did not qualify and did not reply to our letter asking if they did indeed have relatives or work that made them eligible. Unfortunately I had the form letter transcribed literally. Now in Serbian (and Croatian) there is a very complicated relationship system with special names for every relationship, including those of cousins on both sides of the family. Included in these names were the use of “brother from the aunt” or “sister from the uncle” denoting cousins, sometimes quite far removed. In normal talk the Serbs would refer to their cousins as “brothers or sisters” so when our letter went out all the applicants noted that they did indeed have “brothers” or “sisters” in the United States. Everyone in Yugoslavia has some sort of cousin in the U.S.! It took another mailing and much correspondence to untangle this mess. I should have said to my staff, “Look this over and see if there are any problems” but I just said “Translate i.”

Q: I notice that in '67 to '68, you were a personnel officer in the Department of State. My assumption is that you were dealing with assignments to consular positions of Foreign Service officers. Is that correct?

KENNEDY: Yes. If you look at my career, you'll see that when I left Saudi Arabia and I came to INR, which is essentially a political job dealing with the Horn of Africa, I was reaching a crucial point within the Foreign Service, and that was that I really should have had an assignment that was a fully diplomatic one, political or economic type officer, after that. Yet I liked consular work very much, and I wanted to go to Eastern Europe. So when I got a chance to go to Yugoslavia as a consular officer, I took it with the idea of, “I'll be a consular officer and get out very quickly and try to move into another section.” But I found the work so much fun, being my own boss. And political and economic work, although the five years I was in Yugoslavia, I was offered the chance to move into those sections, I found that I'd be number three or four man in one of those sections, and having run an office, it would have been quite a comedown for me personally, although in Foreign

Service terms, this would be a promotion, because in those days, consular work was looked down upon.

I say this only as preface to being in personnel and looking after consular appointments, because this was the beginning of, you might say, a new corps of Foreign Service officers who were interested in consular work. The Department of State was beginning to have some concern about the rather poor personnel they had as consular officers, because although we had an exam process to recruit officers, the majority of people who rose to positions as beyond the vice consul position, consuls in consular sections, were usually a man or woman who had entered through secretarial and courier, clerical, and moved up because the regular Foreign Service officers had abandoned the field.

Q: Does this mean that at least until the latter part of the '60s, generally speaking, career consular officers had not really entered through the Foreign Service examination route?

KENNEDY: This is true. There is a very sound reason for doing it. One, consular work was looked down upon, but there's a very practical reason. Until about, I'd say as an arbitrary date, the mid-'60s, no consular officer identified as really a career counselor officer, somebody who had done this most of their career, had become higher than an FSO-3, in those days equivalent to the colonel status in the military. Nobody had achieved the ranks of FSO-2 or FSO-1. Those now, I think, are designated as FS-1 or FS-2, the minister consular rank. Things were just changing about '67 or '68, when I came into personnel. I think two women officers became FSO-2s.

Q: Who were the officers that you were working with in personnel on the upgrading of the consular career? What particularly did they bring to that job?

KENNEDY: In the first place, there was a new Acting Administrator for Security and Consular Affairs, and that was Barbara Watson, who was a very dynamic person. She was insisting that consular people be more qualified. My immediate boss was Loren Lawrence. We were both FSO-3s at the time. I might say that my career sort of blossomed

in Yugoslavia. When I started to go there, I was FSO-6 when I was assigned to Yugoslavia for language training. By the time I left, I was FSO-3.

Lorie Lawrence later became ambassador to Jamaica and was head of the Passport Office, had a rather good career. But both Lorie and I were just beginning to tell people “no” when they wanted to enter consular ranks. I mean, if they weren't qualified, we would say no. It often had been used as a way to encourage or to reward people in the clerical ranks to move up without regard to would they make a good consular officer. We were beginning to look harder.

Q: What were some of the other issues that you dealt with as you were doing consular staffing service? For example, in what way did you relate to the people in the personnel assignment system who were working on senior training — the War Colleges, for example? Were you able to begin to get the personnel system sensitized to assign consular officers who were worthwhile, to significant training assignments?

KENNEDY: I don't think so. If I recall, I think Lorie Lawrence was the first person who was a real consular officer to get assigned to senior training. There may have been others, but somebody who, as a matter of policy, went there. Maybe I was the second one to go to senior training myself. No, we had a lot of trouble with personnel, because the normal personnel people, for 50 years, had been able to use consular assignments as a way of sort of dumping people or rewarding people, again, irrespective of the qualifications. We were beginning to resist this, and this caused a lot of trouble, because we were getting a lot of people unhappy in the personnel system.

Q: I see that from the Department, you went in 1969 and '70 to Saigon as consul general. This, of course, was at the height of our involvement there, but at the same time, shortly after it became obvious that we were going to be reducing our military presence there and hopefully eliminating it as quickly as possible. Do you think you could tell us something

about the consular work in Saigon, movement of peoples who were in Saigon during that period of '69 and '70?

KENNEDY: The interesting thing, really, is that there wasn't a great press for visas. The war wasn't going too badly. I arrived in February 1969, and I left in July 1970. Those 18 months, American troops were beginning to disengage, the war had gone rather well, the Viet Cong had exhausted itself in the Tet Offensive the year before I arrived, and the situation was, you might say, upbeat. Another thing that one has to remember is that the Vietnamese themselves really loved their families, loved their homes. You might think, “Gee, everybody wants to get out of here.” There wasn't much of this. Some professionals had left, but if they were going anywhere, they would probably try to go to France rather than the United States. So our main emigration was wives of G.I.'s, and even those might get their visas, but then they would go to the United States, take a look around, and say, “To hell with this,” and many of them came back and kept their green cards [alien registration cards]. But our problem was often trying to tell the American husbands that their wife, who had gone home to see the family, she really wasn't being trapped back in Vietnam; she just didn't want to come back at that point.

Prostitutes were always a problem for consular officers where ever American soldiers are stationed, and we had about half a million G.I.s in Vietnam at one point. The consular problem was that prostitutes were not eligible for visas under the law and the only way around the problem was if a special act of Congress was passed for each exception. Congressmen were not happy about having to introduce special legislation for constituents who had married prostitutes, consuls were unhappy about the paperwork and investigations that had to be done on each case, and the men marrying these girls were not only unhappy, but angry at the consuls for impeding their brides from coming back to their homes. During the Vietnam war Congress changed the law to make it easier, and we consuls breathed a sigh of relief.

Some of the girls that the soldiers would become involved with were pretty unattractive and I wonder how they made out when brought home. They looked pretty good after being out in the jungle, but I suspect that most of these marriages did not last and the girls were thrown on their own resources, generally back to prostitution at massage parlors, within a short time. I remember we would get letters from time to time from a ex-soldier asking us to locate “Jenny (or Mary, Susie) etc. who lived in the third “hooch” [hut] in the prostitute section of Vung Tau, the local R & R [Rest and Rehabilitation] area near Saigon and ask her to marry him.” We would try to help and sometimes could locate the young ladies and put them in touch with their loved ones in America. The problem was that the ladies of Vung Tau were “rent-a-girls” who would take care of a soldier for the week of his leave and then move on to another and often have no remembrance of the man who had rented her some months before.

Q: You're saying there was, in a certain sense, a misconception or a poor communication or poor understanding. The Americans assumed that these women were in terrible difficulty and desperately trying to get out, whereas in actual fact, many of the Vietnamese spouses were not that terribly concerned about not returning to the United States, at least at that point.

KENNEDY: Absolutely. It was quite a contrast between Korea, where there was not a war, when I served some years later. So immigration from Vietnam was not as major a problem as were other problems of Americans in trouble, but that's another story.

One problem that I did have was with Vietnamese orphans whom Americans wanted to adopt. The situation was urgent. Because of the war there were many orphans, often just infants being kept under appalling conditions in hospitals. Americans respond to this sort of crisis and were trying to adopt these children. The problem was that the Vietnamese had a French-based law on adoption. It was a typical European approach to adoption for the time. You had to be of the same race, religion and over 50 in order to adopt a particular child. Of course this ruled out almost all Americans. The only way to get the

adoption approved and a visa issued was to get the law waived. The only person who could waive the law was the President of Vietnam, who had other more pressing problems. President Thieu would not delegate this task and so there was quite a bottleneck. From time to time I would send word to the ambassador that we would like some movement on the orphan approval business and reluctantly he would raise the issue.

Q: Of course, from 1975 on, we began to have large numbers of people leaving. Were there any precursors? Were there any signs that such a thing might happen?

KENNEDY: No. As I say, the war was going well, and it was only when things started to collapse that everybody tried to get the hell out. There was a general feeling that if the country was to collapse, if the Vietnamese Government would collapse and the North would take over, yes, there would be a tremendous desire to get out. But that just wasn't happening when I was there.

Q: Then from Saigon, you went to Athens, where you were consul general from 1970 to 1974. Of course, this was right at the height of the colonels, the fairly repressive regime. I gather by the time you got there, the King had already fled. In what way did consular work and movement of peoples relate to the general problem of Greek-American relations at that time?

KENNEDY: Oddly enough, very little. We had a great deal of trouble with Americans, particularly Greek-Americans, who came back and would demonstrate against the colonel's regime, Papadopoulos and company. They had a referendum in which the King was deposed. But the Greeks left Greece for economic reasons, and these were almost always the poorer classes. Many of the wealthier Greeks had taken precautions over the years to be sure that they had a safe haven, and they still continue to do it. If they had any claim, they would get themselves a green card and go to the United States as an immigrant, but then often would return to Greece — these are people with money — to

continue their business, but just in case trouble came, they could keep the resident alien card in their hip pocket and be able to leave in a hurry.

As far as any feeling that the Greeks were leaving the country because of political reasons, no. There might have been a few. Some of the better known exiles and all would leave for France or England, and some to the United States would stay as non-immigrants and carry on anti-colonel regime activities.

Q: I see you were an examinations officer for Board of Examiners of the Department of State from '75 to '76. As I understand it, at that time you were the chairman of what was called consular cone. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe you were involved in directing the process of selecting consular officers, Foreign Service officers, who were coming into the Foreign Service with the intention of specializing in consular affairs. I gather that this is perhaps continuing what you were doing when you were a personnel assignments officer from '67-'68, which was the beginning of what I would call the upgrading of the consular career.

Could you tell us how the process of consular cone officer selection actually proceeded, what was helping you to achieve the objective of getting good officers, and what was hurting you.

KENNEDY: First, I think I'd better explain the term “cone.” It's a horrible term, and somehow I think it has to do with computer data entry. But anyway, it was picked up early in the State. It means, really, the consular specialization. To be clear, anybody entering the Foreign Service since the mid-'70s would enter the Foreign Service as a Foreign Service officer. However, there was an effort to take officers who, before you entered, say, you needed so many administrative officers, you needed so many political officers, forecast the future. “So let's try to get people who will probably stay in these specialties, and try to identify them before we take them on board, with the idea being that most of them will

probably be staying in the area to which they were hired, but can move from cone to cone at a latter part of their career if they so choose."

So we would examine all officers. I just represented somebody from the consular side, but there would be somebody else from political, USIA, etc., sides. There would be three examiners for each candidate. They were given an oral interview for about an hour or so.

One of the hardest things was to define what makes a good consular officer. As an experienced chief of section, where I'd run various sections in the Foreign Service and observed young officers, I found that the same qualities that made for a good political officer often made for a good consular officer. Both people deal with the public, that's imperative. Sensitivity to people; you don't have to be a pushover for a story, but you've got to understand the pressures under which other people are working in another culture. An ability to make decisions and explain decisions, but not be pig-headed about them. And a sense of history and understanding of both the history and the culture of the country that you're dealing with. In other words, bright, informed, personable and self-confident young men and women.

After that, really of less importance is an ability to memorize rules and regulations, because those things come with the job. You learn them on the job. Too often there's a tendency to say that if somebody will make a good lawyer, they'll make a good consular officer. I'd say that probably being a good social worker or a good desk sergeant at a police station would make a better consular officer than somebody who is legally inclined, because it's an art, not a precise law. And this is what I was looking for.

Q: Did you get a sense that other areas of the Department were still resisting the idea that consular officers were involved mainstream activities, as far as U.S. foreign relations were concerned? And if this is the case, how did that play itself out in, for example, discussions between other members of the Board of Examiner panels?

KENNEDY: To begin with, there's a dirty word in consular lexicon, which is “substantive.” In State Department language, you are a substantive officer if you deal with political or economic events, but you are a non-substantive officer if you are dealing with administrative or consular events. Looking at it purely from the consular viewpoint, if an officer dealing with the protection and welfare of Americans abroad or the selection of future Americans through the emigration process is considered by the State Department and, really officially, because this is a deceptive word and certainly was in the time that I'm talking about, that is a process which is not of the substance of what the State Department is dealing with. And that represents the attitude.

You see, the consular branch had traditionally been an easy place to put problem personnel. An ambassador has a secretary who's tired of being a secretary; a courier is tried of traveling; a clerk wants to move up from the file room. Now, there's nothing wrong with any of these aspirations, but they're going to put them into consular jobs. Some are extremely qualified and they entered the lower ranks of the Service for one reason or another, and we'd be delighted to have them move up to consular officer positions. But the greater number really weren't qualified and had not the intellectual background or maybe even the intellectual apparatus, or sensitivity to deal with consular problems. But the consular service had always been a handy escape valve for taking people whom you have to take in for political or other reasons.I'll give you two cases in point. What do you do with the wives or sometimes husbands of Foreign Service officers? One very strong recommendation from within the State Department is to turn them into consular officers. Supposedly there will be some screening, but in other words, you wouldn't say, “Turn them into political officers.” Another example is you find — and it's still true today — a disproportionate number of minority officers, who are brought in on special programs, not through the normal examination process, but in programs designed as sort of a catch-up for previous discrimination. You will find they are being put into consular jobs. It is considered a dumping ground, to some extent, I'm afraid, it has been.

Q: You went to Seoul in Korea, where you were consul general from 1976 to 1979. What were the types of problems that you faced? One impression I get is that Korea is now a major source of immigration into this country. Did this figure in the period you were there?

KENNEDY: Yes. The figure had moved from — I may be somewhat off on this, but say about 7,000 Koreans; 7,000 to 8,000 were getting immigrant visas to the United States in approximately 1970. By 1979, we were issuing over 30,000. It was because as more Koreans get into the United States, more were becoming qualified for immediate relative status, and they brought others in. Also, the Koreans wanted to get out, and their government was encouraging them to. There were a number of ways this was being done. One is just the normal way: somebody (particularly a woman) goes to the United States, marries, and sends for her family.

With the G.I.s there, both wittingly and unwittingly, the Korean's families that wanted to go to the United States were not averse to using them. We're really talking about not the upper class, but the poor people who wanted to go to the United States and better themselves. In a country where women were treated, if not as cattle, damn close to it, one female member of the family, a sister of a large family, would be designated as the bride. She would go, and it would be arranged. Either a G.I. would be paid off, an American soldier would be paid off, or just by normal attraction — she would go out and meet him, get married, with no real intention of continuing the relationship, or if she did it, it was a begrudging one. So she had obtained American citizenship status within two or three years, and then send for the rest of the family. This was, I've always felt, a perversion of the law, because the idea is to unite families. Well, in the Korean context, when a woman marries, she moves into somebody else's family; she's no longer really in close relation to her brothers and sisters, because they move on. They are not that tightly knit a family, particularly for women, to the rest of the family from which she's born. But using this, there was a lot of what was really, if not illicit, it was almost illicit type immigration.

Then we had a great deal of fraud. Koreans were willing to pay a great deal of money, and I had about four or five people fired after a big investigation in the consular section because of immigrant visa fraud. This is fraudulent petitions, fraudulent relationships.

Q: There were Korean national employees you're talking about?

KENNEDY: These are Korean national employees. I was always worried about our American officers, because I was concerned that they might get too friendly. They'd could be vulnerable to either gifts, sexual favors or the like, because it was that type of society where both sexual favors and gifts were readily offered. I had no knowledge of any problems, but I certainly kept it in mind. With our Korean employees, it was mainly just payoffs. After I left, there has been a sort of revolving scandal. There are always people being fired because of the problem. On the other hand, I have to say that the Koreans make good citizens, hard-working people, and really one of the successes.

Here I just might mention one of the problems of being a consul general and the head of a consular section, that is dealing with the junior officers, to get them to understand, in a way, the facts of life. Because many of the young officers come out from the academic world and have not been exposed to, let's say, the “cruel world.” They're not used to being lied to, at least for official reasons. Immigrants or perspective immigrants will often lie in order to get that visa and, in a way, fair enough. I think most of us would probably do the same, because it is a major benefit to most foreign families in countries such as Korea and Yugoslavia, to become an American citizen. Yet some of the young officers would just get absolutely indignant, and not only get indignant when they were lied to, but vindictive.

I spent a great deal of my time having to get these officers to understand it's not really that awful. You treat it, you deal with the problem; you don't say, “I understand,” and issue the visa. You may refuse the visa, but you have to keep it in perspective. One of my major jobs, I felt, was to act as a counselor or psychiatrist when a young officer is up against the pressures of immigration and what it does to him or her.

Q: One of the themes that is coming out of a number of things that you have discussed with regard to this theme in your several assignments, is what I would call the training function of the consular-officer-supervisor. One gets the impression that a lot of work is done by supervisors in training, or at any rate, it should be. I wonder if you could expand on that topic a little bit.

KENNEDY: Yes. I would say it's probably the major function, because when you reach a certain point, you're no longer interviewing prospective immigrants. It's not a bad idea to go in from time to time and test the waters, to keep your hand in. I have to add that I've never found it easy to say “no” to a person. It's not much fun, and it's hard work because of the need to say “no” to a lot of people, insofar as, “No, I can't give you a visa because you, for one reason or another, don't qualify.”

We have usually two types of officers. One are the regular officers, brand-new, one of their first or second assignments is in the consular section, rather naive about the world and, as I mentioned before, overly indignant if lied to or somebody's trying to put it over on them. The other one is that we still have a good number of officers who are brought in for other reasons. I'm talking about there are still officers who are not as qualified as the bright examination-type officers, the ones who passed the examinations, but the ones brought in for other reasons, minority programs, keeping husbands and wives together, promotion within the clerical ranks, and the like. These officers of the second category can be rather unsure of themselves and stick to the rules and regulations. The visa rules are such that it's quite easy to say “no,” but the thrust of our immigration policy is really to say “yes.” It's very difficult to bring these substandard officers to understand that they have to use their judgment and they have to be able to make reasonable exceptions in order to have a fair visa law, rather than to say “no.”

Q: I wonder now if we could go to your assignment as consul general in Seoul from 1976 to 1979. The statistics show that in the 1970s, Korea became a very large source of

immigrants to this country. My impression is that that's fairly new. Could you give some indication of what operational problems and policy problems this posed for you?

KENNEDY: Yes. In the first place, you have to look upon immigrant visas coming from some countries, why they grow. There's always the change. The European demand has gone down; the Asian demand has gone up. It takes a while for the people in a country to get their visas. What happened in Korea would be that a G.I. would marry a Korean woman; she eventually would become a citizen; she would, getting her preference as an American citizen, send for her brothers and sisters. When they get to the United States and they become American citizens — it could take five years — then their husbands and wives of these brothers and sisters would then send for their brothers and sisters, also of the family, but it was the brothers and sisters who really drive the figures up. And when they became citizens, they would again send for their brothers and sisters.

Q: How many officers and employees did you have, and how did you divide their functioning as far as the various consular services were concerned?

KENNEDY: I'm guessing a little bit as far as the staffing pattern. I had one officer during non-immigrant visas, one officer doing American services, including protection of welfare passports, and about four to five officers doing immigrant visas, and then myself and a deputy. That was more or less the working pattern, and we had maybe 30 Koreans who were divided proportionally about the same, mainly in the immigrant visa process.

Q: I notice you had a deputy. Did you, the way you managed that section, delegate management of the section largely, while you did other things? If that's the way it was, what were the types of things that specifically occupied you as consul general?

KENNEDY: I've never held myself to really being a visa expert. I know the law. But I was lucky, I had two deputies, one was Olin Whittemore, and then Sunao Sakamoto, both of whom knew visa work and they knew it well. So I left the day-to-day supervision of those functions to them. I spent more of my time on looking over the major management things.

We were trying to automate the system, and we volunteered to be a post to try an early Wang computer, to see if we could automate it, because we had over 100,000 names in our files. I'd say 60% of them, the last names were either Kim, Yang, Park, or Chou. A very difficult problem to sort out who was who. We worked with the computer, but it never quite panned out, because in those days — things have changed so much — the computer capacity was just too small to really handle the information. The other reason was that the thrust of this was not coming out of the visa office, but out of the central — I think it was called ISO — the central computer people in the Department. That meant that we didn't have the full cooperation of the Visa Office. I wasn't aware initially that there was this problem, that we were actually asking for help from the wrong place. The visa office eventually did come up with their own program and duplicated very much what we were trying to do, and did it better.

Q: Did you have much fraud in Korea? If so, how did you deal with it?

KENNEDY: To use a good old American term, “oi ve!” Fraud was the name of the game in Korea. Koreans wanted to go to the United States. We had this peculiar law that disqualified all sorts of people, and the Koreans are very pragmatic people. For example, there was a section of the Immigration Law saying that an unmarried son 21 years of age could receive a high priority to get into the United States, however, if he were married, he couldn't come into the United States for a long time, so they'd divorce. They'd turn around and come in, come back and remarry. People would make up false labor certificates. You really couldn't trust birth certificates. Relationships are very tangled in Korea at the best of circumstances, because often a family would, say, without males, sort of absorb a cousin's male children into their family if they have enough money. That type of thing.

Then there's just plain outright fraud of families paying a G.I. or someone else to marry a daughter, supposedly, to go to the United States, where she would leave her so-called spouse, but maybe stay long enough to get quick citizenship, three years, then turn around and bring the rest of her family.

There were ways of getting into the United States if you had the cooperation of the Korean clerks within the visa function. When I was there, we had a major scandal. I was then concerned about what I felt were signs that there was fraud, but I didn't know. I asked the Office of Security to send in a special team, which they did do, and we dismissed about four people. It was the first, I think, really major discovering of fraud in our embassy, but I found out, after I'd been gone for several years, just when I was doing this, a whole new fraud of fake petitions was being started, just when I felt I was cleaning out the shop. I talked to my successors, and it's unending.

Here I want to tell of an effort on my part to get some control over the documentation process in Korea. The Canadian Consul, Con Adams, and I had discussed the problem that we had with all the “fly-by-night” visa brokers in Seoul. These were operators who would take a prospective visa applicant and do all the necessary work in getting documentation for both visas and passports. there was a legitimate need for this type of work. Getting documents in the complex bureaucracy of Korea was difficult and very time-consuming. It was particularly difficult for American soldiers trying to get everything for their brides. These were usually girls with little knowledge of the way to work within the Korean bureaucracy and it was only natural to hire someone to do it. The problem, as we saw it, was twofold. First, the brokers often charged outrageous sums for their services to Americans; and secondly, they often cooked up documents and fraud was endemic, not only with the G.I. bride visas but with regular Korean visa applicants. The motto of the visa broker was “can do” as far as making anyone eligible for a visa.

When we would discover a case of visa fraud we would report it to the police and there would be an investigation, but the visa brokers often would pay off the investigators or just close their offices and move down the street and open another with a new name.

The Canadian Consul, Con Adams, and I approached the Foreign Ministry with a complaint and a proposal, the complaint was about the corruption in the visa/passport process and the proposal was that the Korean Government should somehow get some

control over it, that it was embarrassing the Government. Within a few months the Koreans came back with a plan. Essentially it was to make some officially sanctioned visa broker offices. No one could get documents without going through one of the three private offices. Everyone in those offices would be registered so that blame could be assigned in case of fraud. Also a firm set of fees would be published so that the G.I. or the Korean visa applicant would know exactly what he or she had to pay. We insisted that allowance be made for those who wanted to do all the running around for the documents themselves, which a few did, very few.

This procedure, after some negotiation over particulars, was put into effect. It did not cure the corruption/fraud process, but it did put some brakes on it since we could and did nail people who were caught. No system can work smoothly in a country where payoffs are expected and there is pressure to get certain services, but it did help channel our investigations and to keep the American serviceman from being bilked.

I should mention here that one problem that we did not have in Korea was with fake students. In many other countries, especially in the Middle East , young men will apply for visas to go to some rinky-dink school of flying, woodcarving or the like. They were really not going to study, but paid a fee to a marginal school for its paper of acceptance in order to get student visas and then go to the United States and work. In Korea the Government would not give undergraduates visas, only graduates and they were going to the top schools, MIT, Cal Tech, Harvard and so forth.

Q: Do you believe that this terminates what we need to talk about as far as Seoul is concerned?

KENNEDY: Just one more thing about Seoul. One of the things I had to get across to my young officers, who would often be upset about the pressures and the fraud and all, was that despite it all, despite the fraud, despite the work pressure and all, not to take it too seriously. You tried to do what you could, but the main thing was that the Koreans coming

into the United States, for the most part, really turned out to be the most admirable people, hard-working, made good citizens, and so you enforce the law, but at the same time, you had to keep in mind that no matter how they got in, we were probably coming out with a fairly good product.

Q: Your last overseas post in your career was consul general in Naples from '79 to '81. I know that at one point, Southern Italy was a major immigration source for the United States. I also have the impression that this was not the case when you were there. Could you discuss that for us?

KENNEDY: Yes. I think to all of us in the Foreign Service, Naples has always stood as being one of the great immigrant posts, but by the time I arrived there, it had fallen on, you might say, sad days, because having come from Korea, where we were issuing 30,000 immigrant visas a year, I found it somewhat of an anticlimax to come to Naples, where we were issuing less than 2,000, just around 2,000 at the time. The numbers seemed to be decreasing each year.

The reason for this was that people in Europe were no longer immigrating to the United States in great numbers. The law had changed; it was harder for them to come; the pressures weren't as great; life in Europe was getting much better. In Italy, to be specific, Southern Italy was still a very poor area, but what they were doing was, they were going up to Milan or Turin. They had what they called internal migration. They were going to the north to work in automobile factories. Then they could always come home for Easter, for Christmas, for the holidays. It served them far better than going to the United States. It was a little bit sad to go and look at the big halls of the Consulate General that you knew thronged with people waiting to go to the United States, and to see them almost deserted, except for some nonimmigrants.

Q: I think another problem that you might have been faced with was third-country visa applicants in Naples. I know, for example, that in 1979, the Iranian revolution happened,

and you were there for the first two years of the revolution. Did that impinge in any way on your work? If it did, could you expatiate on some of the problems or issues involved with that?

KENNEDY: A little bit on the background. Anybody who served in Europe, this is before the Iranian revolution, learned to — the word may be strong, but it's appropriate — detest Iranian students. Iranian students were a set of young men, mostly — I can't think of any women — who would shop around. I know in Belgrade I had them, in Athens I had them. They were everywhere I served. They were looking for ways to get into the United States as so-called students, but once there, they would often get jobs or dig themselves in so they had their green card for one reason or another, and then often go back to Iran, but keeping their American ties, so they could get out of the country any time they wanted. So with that as background, we were very suspicious of Iranian students, because we knew that their student visas really were designed just to get them in, settle in and work.

The Iranian revolution sort of rolled on. It was not a one-shot deal; it went over a few years, while various things were happening. In the United States, there was, and is, a rather large Iranian community that's also very wealthy. So there was a great deal of pressure, particularly in areas of California and New York and all, on Congress to let as many Iranians get into the United States as possible, as refugees, really. The visa law said we had to make sure we were giving them a non-immigrant visa to go to the United States, only for a short period of time and return. How do you give a non-immigrant visa to somebody who is obviously getting the hell out of the country, and with very little chance of his wanting to go back?

We were getting very peculiar instructions from the Department of State. Obviously a great deal of political pressure was coming from Congress to issue visas to these Iranians: “Don't question them. Give them non-immigrant visas.” At the same time, we all, almost to a man or woman in the consular service, knew that these were refugees, and if you wanted to get them in as refugees, you give them refugee visas. Well, this

is before the hostage crisis. The visa office didn't want to get into the refugee business because it wasn't an act of Congress. They could not order us to issue illegal visas, but they sure wanted us to, and they wanted us to in the worst way. They were sending us almost specific instructions to issue the visas, and all over the world, consular officers were saying, “No.” We were turning them down. It was quite a state of affairs.For one thing, we also got very nervous about Iranians, because we didn't want a lot of them around, particularly after the hostages were taken at our embassy. There were stories floating around that the Iranian students were going to try to seize consulates or maybe assassinate us, and given the state of anti-American hysteria in Iran at the time, this was not without some logic. So we just didn't want them in our offices. There was a great deal of conflict in the policy between the posts abroad and the visa office.

Q: In this particular thing with the consular officers' “revolt,” which we've heard about, did the embassy in Rome basically support what consular officers in the Italian posts were doing? Or were there some people in the embassy, perhaps, who for political reasons wanted the consular officers to do that which the consular officers felt they couldn't do because of law? In other words, were there internal struggles in the American Foreign Service posts overseas, or was the overseas establishment united, if you will, against the Visa Office sending these instructions to the field?

KENNEDY: From my experience — and I'm only speaking from my viewpoint as consul general in Naples — I think the consular operations overseas were united against the Visa Office in that they were not going to give visas without question to the Iranians. I felt no pressure at all from our embassy in Rome.

There were some exceptions, and these usually were posts run by relatively junior officers who were getting streams of sort of ambiguous but very pointed instructions from Washington and would give in. I think Switzerland had some officers there who were willing to issue visas rather easily, and the Iranian flood churned toward these posts, they

could smell it out faster than we could. So I think this is what happened, but I don't think the embassy was supporting the visa office at the time.

Q: I see your next to last assignment in the Foreign Service was a rather interesting and curious one. You were the State Department liaison officer or political advisor to the Commission of the Immigration and Naturalization Service from 1982 to 1984. If my memory serves me correctly, there never was such an assignment before you, nor has there been one since you left in 1984. I think we'd like to know something about that assignment, how it came about, how you were picked, and how it worked and if it worked.

KENNEDY: The answer to how it worked, it didn't. How I was picked was I happened to be a free officer. I came back when it was a time of a surplus of senior officers. By that time, I was at the rank of Minister/ Counselor, and there were only one or two jobs that would be possible for a person of my rank with consular experience, and they were filled. So the problem was what to do with me. Diego Asencio was Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, and had the very valid idea that since the Immigration Service and the consular services worked so closely together on visas, and actually on citizenship matters, that there should be some form of liaison. He talked to the head of INS, Alan Nelson, to accept an exchange of officers. Nelson rather reluctantly, I think, was talked into it. He went along with the idea.

An INS officer was sent on a three-month tour to the consular affairs office in the State Department, and I went to INS. It never worked. Diego Asencio did involve the Immigration officer in policy considerations and all this. He made a valiant effort. But INS never took me to its bosom. Perhaps it was my fault, that I didn't do the right things or show enough initiative, but I think it was endemic to the situation. The Immigration Service has always been very leery of the State Department; they feel that the State Department is an elite institution with a bunch of swift talking officers who just don't understand the Immigration officer's point of view, and they feel like they're country cousins. So I think they are inclined to deal with us very carefully. There was another problem. Alan Nelson, a very

friendly man, but basically his top men were all outsiders. They came from the Reagan Administration. But they were going to run it without much help from INS professionals from within their own organization, so that the actual serving Immigration Officers really had very little say at the time I was there in the high command, and they weren't going to listen to their own professional officers they sure as hell wouldn't listen to a Foreign Service Officer.

There just was very, very little cooperation between the State Department and the Immigration Service. One thing in particular, I was trying to get our computers to read their computers. We were trying to get a system so that any person that came into the United States on a non-immigrant visa would have a computer number, sort of a bar code that you could read by computer, by wand, such as they use for library books or in supermarkets. And you'd know exactly where somebody was.

Q: Like the holography system.

KENNEDY: Yes, of that system. Each person would get a unique number as they came in. We'd already started this with our passport system, and wanted to develop a system so that we issued a visa and you could track a person all the way through. But INS went their own way, so there was no compatibility and no attempt at compatibility. There were other examples of where we tried to get together.

After Diego Asencio left in late '83, the life went out of this liaison, and I left shortly thereafter and began to make plans for my retirement.

Q: As you look back on your consular career now, are there any things that strike you with particular reference to movement of peoples?

KENNEDY: Looking at it, I feel more comfortable with the law that we have today; I'm talking about 1986. Basically the law had changed in 1967, prior to that there were very stringent quotas on Asians. Most Asian countries were only allowed 100 immigrants; now

we're getting thousands from the Philippines, thousands from Korea and India, beginning in China, both beginning to weigh in with their thousands, too. I think we're a better country for it. I feel more comfortable without that blatantly discriminatory policy.

I do feel that our visa, refugee, the whole movement of peoples laws, though, are administered without really having any knowledge of what do we want. If we have to pick and choose who comes in and who doesn't, which is what we were doing, I would prefer it would not apply just to relatives, but tie to need, people who could do the best in the United States, rather than including brothers and sisters. Our visa laws are still, some of them, unfair in that people who lie or sneak across the border are able to adjust their status in the United States, and get ahead of those who have waited legitimately, maybe for years, for their visa priority number to come up. I liked supervising young FSOs, visa work for them was often a traumatic experience for them, being exposed to the real world, and the school teacher in me enjoyed helping them come to understand how to administer a difficult law with fairness and compassion. I also enjoyed dealing with the visa applicants and trying to help them. I did feel, however, that our immigration policy and procedures are not a very well administered, or well thought out.

Q: Are you saying, in effect, that the operational message from the legal and regulatory and procedural matrix of movement of peoples into the United States is governed by the theme "dishonest does pay"?

KENNEDY: Dishonesty pays, political pressure pays. It's not that it's a horribly corrupt system. There is, obviously, corruption there, dishonesty in the form of corruption. I don't think this is a major one. It's more a matter of laissez faire, "What the hell. If Juan gets in by slipping across the Rio Grande, let's see if we can give him a break." So in a way, it's an unwillingness to say no or to be tough, rather than absolutely dishonest.

Q: Thank you very much.

End of interview